

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 NEOLIBERALISM AND CONSUMERISM

As the underpinning ideologies of Thatcherism engulfed the UK, neoliberal rationality permeated throughout our political-economy, labour and now, consumerism, which is shaping more domains of our lives into forms of human capital (Brown, 2015). The ramification of human beings as human capital creates a society where the primary concern is a competitive position, which is hyper-individualised and influences individuals as they navigate their consumption across a terrain of neoliberal policies and markets (*ibid.*). Foucauldian work asserts that in the neoliberal narrative of choice, the 'governmentality' of the state influences the mechanisms of self-surveillance and self-discipline (Foucault, 2008).

1.2 NEGOTIATING FEMINISM

Angela McRobbie, asserts the notion of the 'post-feminist masquerade', which outlines how women have been influenced to avoid adopting feminist positions or challenging inequalities and instead become self-regulative, vocally deprived, post-feminist subjects striving to achieve the perfectible self (McRobbie, 2007, 2009, 2015). Rosalind Gill affirms postfeminist sensibility emphasises individualism, entrepreneurial subjectivity and personal transformation, which in turn has developed a 'tick-box' version of feminism that overlooks the power relations dominating society causing postfeminist culture to become virtually hegemonic (see Gill, 2017; Gill and Schraff, 2013). Goodkind (2009: 400) called this the "neoliberal abduction of feminism". Correspondingly, Catherine Rottenberg argued during an era of postfeminism, neoliberalism and feminism became so entangled together that women's liberation became extremely individualistic and in turn, failed to raise a collective movement towards social justice (see Rottenberg, 2014; Banet-Weiser *et al.*, 2020).

1.3 SOCIAL MEDIA, CONSUMER CAPITALISM AND YOUNG FEMALES

As consumerism has become fuelled by neoliberal mechanisms of power, consumer culture has become entrenched in capitalist and exploitative ideologies, which expose truths of an individual and thus, holds power over and controls the social position and identity of individuals; specifically with the positionality of young females (Foucault, 1978; Foucault, 1989). As young females experience contemporary consumer platforms, such as unregulated social media sites, they are being introduced to the competitive, complex and contradictory terrain of consumerism in an era of neoliberal capitalism, which Currie (1997) would argue is seemingly the development of a "new" site of power utilised for female oppression or liberation.

2. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The intention and purpose this research study is:

- To explore young people's perceptions on how a capitalist consumer-orientated culture across social media impacts and influences young females' identity.
- To acknowledge and gather the voice from below by generating a qualitative dataset from the perceptions of young people, which in turn allows the researcher to gain a view from within the phenomenon.
- To adopt a critical criminological perspective, with the intention of understanding how the underpinning ideologies of consumerism can emanate social harm and injustice.

3. ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

This research project intends to address a significant lacuna in research, which fails to explore the implications of neoliberal ideologies within consumerism, by examining the impacts and influences of consumerism on young females' identity within the cultural boundaries of social media. By offering a unique approach, this research will adopt a critical criminological perspective through a theoretically triangulated lens of zemiology and poststructuralist feminism, to explore the discursive and yet, inherently real-world social harms and injustices, generated by hegemonic and repressive ideologies, which radiate throughout the capitalist ideals of consumerism and more specifically, social media.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN

4.1 RATIONALE

The overarching rationale of this research is to adopt a critical criminological perspective, to acknowledge and gather the voice from below to gain an understanding from within the phenomenon. To achieve this, the research is underpinned by a qualitative feminist methodology grounded by a feminist standpoint epistemology.

4.2 THEORETICAL POSITION

A method of theoretical triangulation allows this research to employ a collaborative position of zemiology and poststructuralist feminism. A zemiological position enables the research to look beyond law-bound definitions of crime and deviance and instead, towards wider analyses of social harms, social injustices and their structural implications. Poststructuralist feminism enables an analysis of power, knowledge, discourse and an understanding of young females' identity from within.

4.3 METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

There were two pilot focus groups conducted at a sixth form in East Liverpool. These pilot studies have been used to inform this research poster and the methodological design of a 3-year PhD research project, which is currently conditional to the Covid-19 pandemic.

4.4 ANALYTICAL STRATEGY

Thematic analysis provides an analytical tool that emphasises the importance of adopting an inductive and immersive approach, to derive relationships, themes and insights capable of informing and developing theory.

5. PILOT STUDY: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

- "[In] this country everyone is very much for themselves, everyone is like you are one person, you are individual, and you will fend for yourself. Whereas, a lot of other countries...are quite collectivist cultures and they like their community and that communal feel does really stop social media from infiltrating into their lives and changing them. But, here, it's very easy for it to do that." (Megan, 19)
- "On social media you are only shown one type of perfect." (Robyn, 17)
- "Sometimes on social media, nowadays, it's very popular to be an activist for something you don't care about... it's like oh I'll share this post to my page" (Megan, 19)
- "The people you follow can be really toxic...you can find yourself in a really toxic place...it's a false sense of happiness" (Chloe, 16)
- "A lot of people don't go off facts they go off what they see on social media...social media really fuels misinformation, mis-education" (Megan, 19)

6. REFERENCES

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